

## Glenda Wiles

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**From:** DEAN H FROST [grandmafrost@msn.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 07, 2008 9:30 PM  
**To:** Travel Management Plan  
**Cc:** Rep. Dennis Rehberg - TMP; TSA - Craig Osterman; rondawiggers; SAWS JanineS; CBU Kerry White; Glenda Wiles  
**Subject:** Letter Re: Bitterroot NF TMP  
**Attachments:** TMP - Bitterroot Ridgerunners.doc

Attn: Chris Fox

Enclosed is the Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club response to the Bitterroot Winter Travel Plan. Our Club represents 250 members. A copy of this letter will also be "mailed" to your Stevensville office.

Sincerely,

Betty Frost, Secretary  
Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club  
PO Box 265  
Hamilton, MT 59840

**RECEIVED**

**JAN 08 2008**

**Ravalli County Commissioners**

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PO Box 265  
Hamilton, MT 59840

January 7, 2008

Travel Management Planning Team  
Bitterroot National Forest  
Attn: Chris Fox  
88 Main  
Stevensville, MT 59870

The Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club has over 250 members from one year olds to over 90 year olds. We are for multiple uses of our forests, not lock-up, and lock out. Our members are from all walks of life including all types of recreation. Our Club is a member of the Montana Snowmobile Association, Treasure State Alliance, Blue Ribbon Coalition, Snowmobile Alliance of Western States, Citizens for Balanced Use and Ravalli County Off-Road Users Association.

This letter is in response to the Proposed Travel Management Plan. This BNF document is totally flawed, skewed, and is discriminatory toward motorized recreation, including snowmobiles. We request that the Forest Service prepare a Programmatic Impact Statement plan of overall goals of restricting motorized recreation.

Your Appendix B provides rationale that is not defensible. Closing areas and trails next to wilderness areas is not acceptable in every case – there are exceptions. You are creating more defacto wilderness. Another concern regarding the proposed defacto wilderness policy is that it brings managed wilderness closer to private property (in some cases it is less than a mile). And the USFS's "Let Burn" policy now presents another consideration that is not addressed. This is a potential disaster for private land owners near the defacto wilderness. What constitutes a motorized setting? The BNF plan doesn't talk about what constitutes any other type of recreation setting. This is ambiguous depending on who you are and how you recreate. It appears that what input we had was left out of the travel plan. Bitterroot Ridgerunners were told that there was no change for snowmobilers. It is pretty obvious this is not true. BNF needs to go back to the planning board and discuss several issues on trail and area closures with Bitterroot Ridgerunners. We were not asked to come back to the table to discuss these closures. Why?

Your purpose seems to imply that you need to resolve conflicts between motorized and quiet users. Where is the data that reflects how many conflicts occurred? Maybe it is not a problem and is a scheme for closures, which is unacceptable. There are other alternatives than to close. Maybe it should be closed to other users instead of always motorized. There are also user conflicts in the wilderness. In fact there was a conflict between hikers, their dog, and the BNF trail packer. We want documented conflicts, not assumptions. Another conflict occurred on Coyote trail this fall between a bicycle rider and horse rider. So let's get real. There are conflicts between all users, but only motorized is being targeted. Horses hate llamas. Where is this addressed?

The wilderness area of the BNF is a vast territory, comprising 47% of the Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) land mass. This area is visited by only 4% of our citizens, termed the “Quiet Users.” They have absolute exclusive use of the wilderness. There are thousands of acres elsewhere on the forest that is also quiet because of inaccessibility by snowmobiles. Examples are North Fork and Twelve Mile Creek areas in Lost Horse and Chicken and Deer Creek in West Fork.

At the present time, the “Quiet Users” have 100% access and availability to the entire BNF. The remaining 53% of the BNF is only partly available to 95% of the population, but is accessible to everyone.

There is another larger segment of the population that cannot take advantage of the wilderness part of our forest and mountains.

- Some are physically unable to enter and enjoy the wilderness areas – this includes (but is not limited to) the elderly, the very young and the handicapped.

- Time constraints for others would preclude wilderness travel. Some people simply do not have the time (a week or more) to travel more slowly or to reach the remote destinations.

Motorized users are far more limited, both legally and naturally by terrain. For example, the Overwhich Trail, 17 miles long and 6 feet wide equals 13-1/2 acres of the 1-1/2 million acres in the BNF. The 60 miles of groomed snowmobile trail (part of which is NOT in the BNF) equals about 153 acres.

Snowmobilers, over the years, have already found the areas that can be used for their type of recreation. Yet, the proposed Travel Management Plan would deny the use of some of this very limited area for winter or summer travel and recreation.

In the face of a growing valley population, BNF should be adopting a “PROVIDING MORE AND PROTECTING WHAT IS” policy directed toward recreation for everyone, thus reducing the concentration of use. This “crowding” is detrimental to the forest, to safety, and to having a quality forest experience.

Where is the evidence that motorized use has negatively impacted wildlife? It is most interesting to note here that the Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has determined that there is a healthy increase in elk population in the southern Sapphire range. Most of the motorized use takes place here. At the same time, a decline in elk population is taking place in the Bitterroots, the wilderness side. Why? It certainly isn't motorized travel. Can it be logically assumed that this applies to other wildlife as well? Big horn sheep stand in the middle of Hwy 93 licking the salt off the road, not moving as cars travel by.

Whose comprehensive plan is it to close Continental Divide trail 9 and trail 313 Sapphire crests to motorized? Just because there is supposedly intent to close, BNF closes it! Not acceptable.

Moose use the snowmobile trails to travel and to “browse” when snow is deep, saving energy as well as having easier access to food sources and staving off starvation in difficult winters. Unlike moose, elk and mule deer move down to west facing slopes in the Sapphires for winter forage. Snowmobilers tend to use much higher elevation for their recreation.

Snowmobiling has been a part of recreation on the BNF since the 1960's. There has been no resource damage, and if there is the Bitterroot Ridgerunners would like to see the documented data.

The Bitterroot National Forest Winter Travel plan addresses only four areas but also covers multiple trail and area closures. We will address these four areas first.

**1. Stony Mountain** – Where does the BNF get their data that this area has little use by motorized? This is not true. Who are the multi-party supporters for recommended Wilderness? This wilderness proposal is recommended in the Forest Plan which is not being addressed at this time. How can the BNF close areas on the assumption that it 'will be' wilderness or proposed wilderness? This is putting the cart before the horse and is not legal. The Montana Fish and Game says snowmobiling may impact goat populations. Where is the data? This is ambiguous and unacceptable. If data can prove this then talk to the Bitterroot Ridgerunners and deal with the problem.

**2. Multiple Access Adjacent to Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness** - Closing these areas are unacceptable for the reason to preserve wilderness character. The Forest has over 470,000 acres of wilderness. Your proposal is making defacto wilderness. They, quiet users, have more than their share now. Not acceptable - no more wilderness.

**3. Anaconda Pintler Wilderness** – Same reasons as above, it is just being closed for whatever reason the BNF can find.

**4. Blue Joint** – Cannot be closed per 1977 Forest plan and will continue to be used as it has been in the past. There has been no resource damage and still looks as it did 100 years ago. We strongly recommend that existing trails in roadless areas remain open to motorized recreation.

Now for the other trail and area closures. **There are four major areas utilized heavily by snowmobilers that were not addressed in your winter travel proposal. They are:**

#### **1. Camas/Kidney Lake Area**

The Bitterroot National Forest Plan proposes to close Camas Creek Area. This area is the only high alpine area snowmobilers have on the BNF. It absolutely can not be closed as it has been used for over 30 years. The only other users are alpine skiers a few times a winter. They have a multitude of quiet areas they can ski if they do not like the sound. There has been no conflict and most of the skiers use snowmobiles to access the area. You did not provide a reason for closure. Camas is 1 of 2 areas on the west side of BNF that is extreme play areas and only 1 of 4 on whole forest. The wilderness boundary is inaccessible by snowmobiles due to cliffs. Zero resource damage.

#### **2. Skalkaho/Crooked Creek**

Area was to remain open early to snowmobiles per agreement with BNF. It was to provide early area snowmobiling. Signs were posted for hunters to recognize this. This should remain open, including Trail 88. We recommend you follow your own agreement, and that future maps leave the Skalkaho Basin open for early snowmobile use.

#### **3. Martin Creek/Mosquito Meadows/Trail #313.**

This area is accessed from several directions including trails 87, 105, 313 and 39. Snowmobiles from Rock Creek access this from Frog Pond basin. Trail 420/421 should be left open. Forest Supervisor, Dave Bull met with the Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club members regarding concerns on the BNF Travel Plan issued July 15, 2005. At that meeting, the Club was advised, that the information on the new travel plan map was inaccurate. Mr. Bull assured the Club that Trail 313 was

not closed. The Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club survival pack is placed at the head of Martin Creek every December and removed after snowmobiling is over. This area is one of the top 4 areas used by snowmobilers. Every high mountain area is becoming off limits to motorized. The Sapphire crest, Trail 313, is a good example. Closing this trail stops almost every motorized rider from making a loop ride. This creates double the usage on these trails accessing the Sapphire crest. An old dozer fire line was built in the 60's down Martin Creek accessing Road 73094 on to Road 75 (Skalkaho/Rye). Road 75 is groomed to provide a series of world class loops. Any part of this is not acceptable for closure. What is the future plan for the Sapphire crest? It appears there is a larger agenda that the people are not being informed about and who is behind it?

**4. Continental Divide Trail** - Continental Divide trail is used heavily by motorized between Lost Trail Pass and Anaconda Pintler Wilderness. No resource damage or wildlife problems. This is our access to Bender Cabin/Schultz Saddle. Why aren't motorized groups brought to the table on these proposals?

**These are other areas that are used by snowmobilers but were not addressed in your winter travel plan proposal.**

**Darby Lumber Sections on Rye Creek**, Section 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 & 15 are unacceptable for closure. They are accessed via Road 715 on Rye Creek. This is a magnificent area that your proposal closes to snowmobiling. Since this large area was previously logged it provides easy access and some of the best "play areas" for snowmobilers of all ages. Snowmobiling does not cause resource damage, nor does it impact wildlife, and Club members are not aware of user conflicts in this area. We are not provided any valid reason for closure and recommend this area be open to winter motorized recreation.

**Bare Cone Ridge between Nezperce and Blue Joint**. This area is also proposed for closure on your map. The upper end, near Bare Cone, is utilized by snowmobiles. This entire area should be left open for over-the-snow access as there is no reason provided for closure.

**Camas Creek Road Access** – Trail 511 through old orchard tract should remain open crossing Coyote Coulee Trail at right angles. This is the old trail to Camas Lakes via Hayes Creek Road and Blue Jay Road #74694 and must remain open year long. This trail is used mostly by locals. The locals prefer accessing directly from their homes rather than having to haul their motorcycle or snowmobile to Lost Horse.

**Road 5623 & Area North of Como Lake** – Leave open, used by snowmobilers and cat hunters.

**Lost Trail Ski Area** – Leave open after ski season closes.

The Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club members request a common sense approach to Forest Travel Management.

## IN CONCLUSION

1. Motorized community supports wilderness the way it is at the present time.
2. We support equal access to the remaining forest lands for all users, motorized and "quiet users" alike.

3. We do not support “concentration of use” in any way.
4. We support conscientious logging.
5. We support closures for site recovery and wildlife security when it can be shown that the conditions exist to warrant it. These areas should then be reopened punctually when the conditions for closure are substantially reduced or eliminated.
6. We do not accept oversight or “misprints” on travel maps. These errors effectively close areas for travel and must then be posted on location. Whether they are actually closed on the map and should be open or open and should be closed MAY not be clear to the motorized users. The posted areas should accurately reflect whether the trail is open or closed.
7. We do not support closures of any trail or area simply based on the decision of persons in authority who do not appear to be considering the large segment of the population using the forest.
8. We support “sunset” rules so closures cannot stay permanently in place when the reason for closure is no longer necessary or valid and those in authority neglect to act.
9. We vehemently oppose closures simply because a trail is in close proximity to a wilderness area. The wilderness is so vast it is its own buffer zone.
10. We strongly uphold that roadless areas should be left as is with existing trails open to motorized recreation.

Sincerely,

Richard Peters, President  
Bitterroot Ridgerunners Snowmobile Club

Cc: -Representative, Dennis Rehberg, [dustin.frost@mail.house.gov](mailto:dustin.frost@mail.house.gov)  
 -Treasure State Alliance, [MtSnowman@snowtana.com](mailto:MtSnowman@snowtana.com)  
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 -Citizens for Balanced Use, [Autodoc@theglobal.net](mailto:Autodoc@theglobal.net)  
 -Senator, Max Baucus, 1821 S. Ave. W., Missoula, MT 59801  
 -Senator, Jon Tester, 116 W. Front St., Missoula, MT 59802  
 -Blue Ribbon Coalition, Mr. Hawthorne, 4555 Burley Dr, Suite A, Pocatello, ID 83202  
 -Ravalli County Commissioners